

THE STUMP

The latest news and updates from the Vance Birthplace Historic Site



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2021 is a year of reflection for the Vance Birthplace staff. We have now weathered one year of COVID-19. When quarantine began last March, our Spring 2020 newsletter was all set to go out. The final edition looked a bit different than the original draft, which is an apt metaphor for the rest of the year. As 2020 progressed, staff at the Vance Birthplace had to perform a rapid rewrite of our plans for special events, field trips, internships, and more. Now, one year after our site initially suspended operations, we are reflecting on the last 365 days.

2021 also marks the Vance Birthplace's 60th anniversary, and we are taking the opportunity to examine the site's interpretive legacy. Read on to get a sneak peek at some of our upcoming projects and discover how it's going at the Vance Birthplace.

A Message from Kimberly

KIMBERLY FLOYD, SITE MANAGER

“Difficulty creates the opportunity for self-reflection and compassion.” Suzan-Lori Parks

It has been a year since we suspended operations and took our programs and interpretation virtual. In 2019 I received a gift that has come in quite handy over the last year. It is a five-year memory book. Every day I write a sentence or two about what happened that day. Eventually, I will be able to see how the same day stacks up over five years. For example, on this day in 2019, I ate tacos. I can see what happened each day in 2020 as we were thinking about transitioning, when we implemented new programs, and how they were received. I can recall talking with community partners, stating, “Surely, we won’t still be doing this come December? Maybe we can still figure out a way to do the holiday program in person?” But, alas, here we are. I could not be prouder of our staff and volunteers.

Since our last newsletter we took our two largest annual programs virtual, the Appalachian Folk Festival and our Appalachian Christmas Carol. We utilized Facebook Live and Zoom. One of the most integral components of our Appalachian Folk Festival is the opportunity to meet local craftspeople. In an effort to keep this connection, we launched an online Story Map. We visited our local demonstrators, collected videos, and have added this digital exhibit to our website. For our Christmas Carol, we recorded the play, and added a panel discussion, “It’s Not a White Christmas,” encouraging participants to go behind the scenes with us and think about how the institution of slavery is interpreted and portrayed in museums. And I only speak to our special events. I have not even touched on how our staff quickly pivoted, creating a virtual classroom and important educational materials for teachers.

As we have continued to adjust, the biggest takeaway for staff this last year is accessibility. While visiting the site virtually is a different experience, it is not a loss. Our virtual events had attendees from all over the country. We have school programs from across the state with students that never would have visited the site otherwise. Now in 2021, how do we continue to include these new tools to reach wider audiences while also maintaining that important in-person connection? You can expect to see a mixture of both in the coming years at the Vance Birthplace. We are excited to continue our Quarantined Historians series this spring. And we are excited to bring you a version of our Folk Festival in person but add new craftspeople to our Story Map. We cannot wait to bring you a version of our Christmas Carol onsite again but maintain virtual nights to continue the important conversation around the interpretation of slavery for years to come. We hope you enjoy all of our programs in 2021 and if you can’t make it in person, pop-in for a virtual program!



Reflecting on A Virtual Appalachian Christmas Carol

AARON SNOOK, CO-FOUNDER & CURATOR OF THE AMERICAN MYTH CENTER

"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year." Charles Dickens



Left: One of the moving panoramas, or "crankies," used in the recording of Venus & Vance: A Virtual Appalachian Christmas Carol.

Center: Sonia D'Andrea portrayed Elizabeth Hemphill in the filmed version of the play.

Right: From the viewpoint of Zebulon Vance, viewers of the play were asked to bear witness to the story of Venus, an enslaved woman.

First of all, a huge thank you to all who joined us for *Venus and Vance*. I'm incredibly grateful to my collaborators at the Vance Birthplace Historic Site and to my AMC crew. In 2019, we all agreed that the piece had finally settled into itself as the story became more clearly told, the puppetry more animated, and our tech more reliable. I was looking forward to a smooth fourth year with some minor puppet upkeep and maybe a tweak here or there. We all know what happened next.

When it became clear to us that we'd have to pivot online, I went about adapting the experience for film and I did so with a heavy heart. If the experience was pre-recorded, how would we maintain the communal aspect of the experience and would we lose the theatricality of our storytelling in the camera's lens? While planning our pivot, I caught a virtual showing of *Antigone* in Ferguson by Theatre of War. They had accomplished a two-act structure with the show as Act 1 and a curated conversation as Act 2. Inspired by the format, I proposed that we adopt their two-act structure and, unlike a lot of things these days, it absolutely worked.

Upon reflection, I think there are a few reasons it worked so well. Starting with the film adaptation, we had a baked in advantage over a lot of theatrical pivots: it was an immersive story told from Zebulon Vance's point of view. At the site, we ask the audience to take a leap of faith and wear a name tag that says, "My name is Zeb." With the film, that leap of faith is no longer necessary as we can literally watch the events unfold through his eyes. We received feedback from those that experienced it both ways, saying the virtual was more intimate and immersive than the live version.

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They didn't have to worry about the other people in the tour or the cold weather or the walnuts on the ground; all they had to do was watch. Additionally, I believe the medium of toy theatre allowed us to maintain the theatricality of the storytelling. The tangible nature of puppetry roots the story in architecture and doesn't rely on cinematic tricks. To my surprise, it still felt more like theatre than film.

As to the two-act structure, the most obvious contribution to the evenings' success was the special guests. Kim did a magnificent job inviting brilliant, relevant, and unique voices into the virtual conversation. I cannot begin to tell you the size of the smile on my face as I listened to what our story sparked.

In the end, what I found was a startling, humbling, and inspiring discovery: the American Myth Center's mission is to spark necessary conversation within our community and this iteration of the Appalachian Christmas Carol has been the purest success of that mission to date. I'm already looking forward to next year.



The final scene of An Appalachian Christmas Carol was filmed in the ca. 1790s Slave Dwelling at the Vance Birthplace. Cast and crew members from the American Myth Center also utilized the reconstructed Vance house when filming the play.

Quarantine Project: Stitching an 1860s Dress by Hand

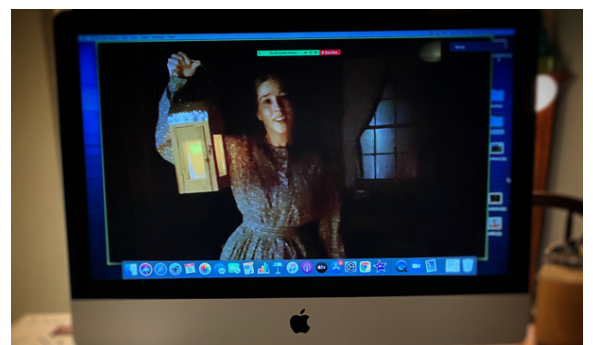
LAUREN MAY, ASSISTANT SITE MANAGER

"When you sew, you have something that will last to show for your efforts." Elizabeth Travis Johnson

Each year, our staff works with the American Myth Center to present An Appalachian Christmas Carol, a theater program and tour that uses moving panoramas and puppet theater to transport visitors to 1863. At the start of the production, attendees encounter Elizabeth Hemphill, the woman who lived in the Vance house during the Civil War. Since Elizabeth sets the scene for the play, the actor portraying her character has to look the part! Unfortunately, our historical clothing collection did not include an appropriate dress for a woman living in the North Carolina mountains during the Civil War. Enter me and my (admittedly rusty) sewing skills.

But first, we had to decide on a pattern that 1) I could manage to recreate with my basic sewing knowledge, 2) could be easily altered to fit multiple people, and 3) Elizabeth Hemphill could actually have worn in 1863. We settled on a ca. 1840s-1860s style wrap dress, which is the closest equivalent to ladies loungewear in the 19th century (strangely appropriate for a 2020 sewing project!). Women typically wore these loose and comfortable garments while working at home, and they also made for excellent maternity dresses since the wrap style could be worn open over a decorative petticoat. We found this to be a fitting (pun intended) choice since Elizabeth Hemphill gave birth to a daughter in 1862. Now all we needed was some suitable fabric and a few lessons in hand sewing!

While I learned to use a sewing machine nearly 15 years ago and have been teaching myself hand embroidery for about 5 years, I had never stitched any piece of clothing by hand. Luckily for me, I could historically accurately rely on a sewing machine for much of the work. Unluckily for me, our site sewing machine broke halfway through the first seam. Therefore, I spent much of August and September with a needle in hand, constructing the wrap dress and petticoat. I am incredibly proud of the final product, and thrilled that visitors will see Elizabeth Hemphill wearing it each December!



*Top: The completed dress and petticoat on a dress form.
Bottom: Actor Sonia D'Andrea portrayed Elizabeth Hemphill in Venus & Vance: A Virtual Appalachian Christmas Carol.*

Tools, Tripods, and Time Travelers: Fall & Winter at Vance Birthplace



TOP LEFT:

On a snowy day in January, Lauren led a virtual field trip for 85 eighth graders in Hickory, NC. Students viewed a guided tour, then participated in an interactive program on artifacts and primary source documents.

TOP RIGHT:

During our Virtual Folk Festival, Dennis gave a tool demonstration on Facebook Live. Dennis showed viewers how people living in the 1800s used different woodworking tools--like this hand adze--to build structures and create furniture.

BOTTOM RIGHT:

Mountain History & Culture Group Board Member Jenny Webb turned pottery at our Virtual Folk Festival on October 17, 2020.

ABOVE:

A film version of An Appalachian Christmas Carol allowed us to share the event virtually. Kimberly led the program, including a panel discussion, from her dining room table.

Spring 2021 Virtual Schedule

"Where flowers bloom, so does hope." Lady Bird Johnson



Quarantined Historians (Mabe or Maybe Not) Drinking Coffee Season 2 Premiere

FRIDAY, APRIL 2

This YouTube series, brought to you by the Vance Birthplace and the Mountain History and Culture Group (MHCG) will return with new episodes through April and May of 2021. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage and tune in every Friday to join a new conversation about history, museums, and interpretation.

Season 2 begins with a virtual version of our annual historic lecture. This year's speaker, Dr. Scott Huffard, is the Program Coordinator of History and Associate Professor at Lees McRae College. He sat down with MHCG President Steve Nash to discuss the expansion, consolidation, and systemization of railroads in the South in the decades after the Civil War. Fill your cup and enjoy the conversation!

Learning with Lauren & Crafting with Kimberly Returns

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2

Pop over to our YouTube channel every Wednesday through June and July for new video programs produced by Lauren and Kimberly. Each set of videos explores a different historic topic by highlighting objects from the Vance Birthplace collection and offering a new craft tutorial each week! These programs are designed as mini-lessons so that students and their families can engage with history outside of the classroom.

The Creation of the Vance Birthplace: The Civil War vs. the Civil Rights Movement

SAVANNAH BENNETT, GRADUATE STUDENT VOLUNTEER

"Try to convince people to understand that things can happen. Change can take place." Marvin Chambers, Civil Rights Activist

When you think of American history in the 1960s, what are you reminded of? You might think of the Civil Rights Movement or the centennial celebrations of the Civil War. Both of these major events have much to do with the origins of the Zebulon B. Vance Birthplace, which opened to the public in May 1962.



A man surveys the former Vance house before reconstruction began in 1960.

Zebulon B. Vance (1830-1894) was a Confederate military officer in the Civil War, a North Carolina Governor, and a United States Senator. Because of his military and political experience, Vance is remembered as an iconic Southern voice during the Civil War and in the subsequent postbellum era. Despite his time spent at his birthplace being relatively brief (from 1830 to 1835), the property is associated with Vance's legacy and has attracted visitors since the early-to-mid twentieth century. Why was it preserved in the 1960s, and how is it related to the Civil Rights Movement?

The Vance Birthplace opened to the public in 1962, a century after the Civil War. The property suddenly became relevant after over 120 years of being sold, lived on by various tenants, and ignored by the general public. Vance was already memorialized in multiple locations across North Carolina. In 1897, the cornerstone of the Vance Monument in Asheville was laid in a public ceremony. Three years later, the state government commissioned a monument that was dedicated to Vance in Raleigh.

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Leaders in Asheville supported the immortalization of Vance's beliefs, contributing to the public's memory of Vance being romanticized. His significance as a politician often takes precedence over the disparaging memories of the Civil War. It is also known that Vance viewed African Americans as being inferior to white people. He tolerated the racism of other white leaders and used those beliefs to his advantage as a political leader. Acknowledging these facts within the context of his birthplace's preservation makes the timeline of events clearer. The opening of this site appealed to a majority of the local public, but it was greatly juxtaposed against the broader American cultural atmosphere of the Civil Rights Movement. It wasn't a coincidence that organizations were advocating for the memorialization of Vance's life at the same time that Asheville's Black community was working toward equality, after decades of marginalization.

Asheville's Black population was marginalized from the 1830s to the 1960s to avoid the disturbance of tourism. The slave industry thrived in Asheville, despite what some may think about Appalachia's relationship with slavery. After the freeing of slaves, many African Americans were only permitted to work as domestic servants. They were the backbone of the tourism industry before and after the Civil War but did not have many opportunities for advancement or growth. As a response to the enduring marginalization that they faced, Asheville's Black community participated in



Groundbreaking ceremony at the Vance Birthplace, 1960.

activism to incite change. Asheville's Civil Rights Movement gained traction in the 1960s because of the momentum of the movement that was advancing across the country. One of many examples is the 1960 sit-in campaign, in which an inter-class coalition of African Americans peacefully demanded desegregation in local restaurants. Many restaurants eventually complied to avoid the disturbance of the tourism industry. These sit-ins were initiated by the Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality (ASCORE), an organization led by Black youth and influenced by the broader Civil Rights Movement taking place across the country.

The activism of Asheville's Black community was occurring at the same time that the Vance Birthplace was funded, completed, and eventually opened to the public. The history of the Vance Birthplace suddenly becomes more complex when it is contextualized alongside the importance of Asheville's Civil Rights Movement. While North Carolina's state government was supporting the Vance Birthplace, Asheville's Black community was organizing sit-ins, working to advance their social standing, and fighting for racial equality. The question, then, is this: why is Vance's life easily remembered, but the fight for equality for Asheville's Black community often overlooked?

How You Can Support the Vance Birthplace

Donate! Your financial contributions help us care for the historic buildings and artifacts; create educational programs, online content, and special events; and bring the history of western North Carolina to an ever-expanding audience. You can send a check made out to the Vance Birthplace to the address below or call (828) 645-6706 to donate over the phone. You can also visit Amazon.com to purchase much needed items from our [wishlist](#)!

Attend programs! Join us for our virtual events, from our Facebook Live videos to our virtual craft workshops. We love seeing familiar faces and new visitors at our programs.

Visit! The Vance Birthplace Site Visitor Center and historic structures are open, weather and staffing permitting. Please call the site to determine what activities are available on the day of your visit. We look forward to seeing you soon!

Share the love! Drop us a line sharing why you love the Vance Birthplace! Whether through email, snail mail, or social media messaging, your supportive words inspire us!



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